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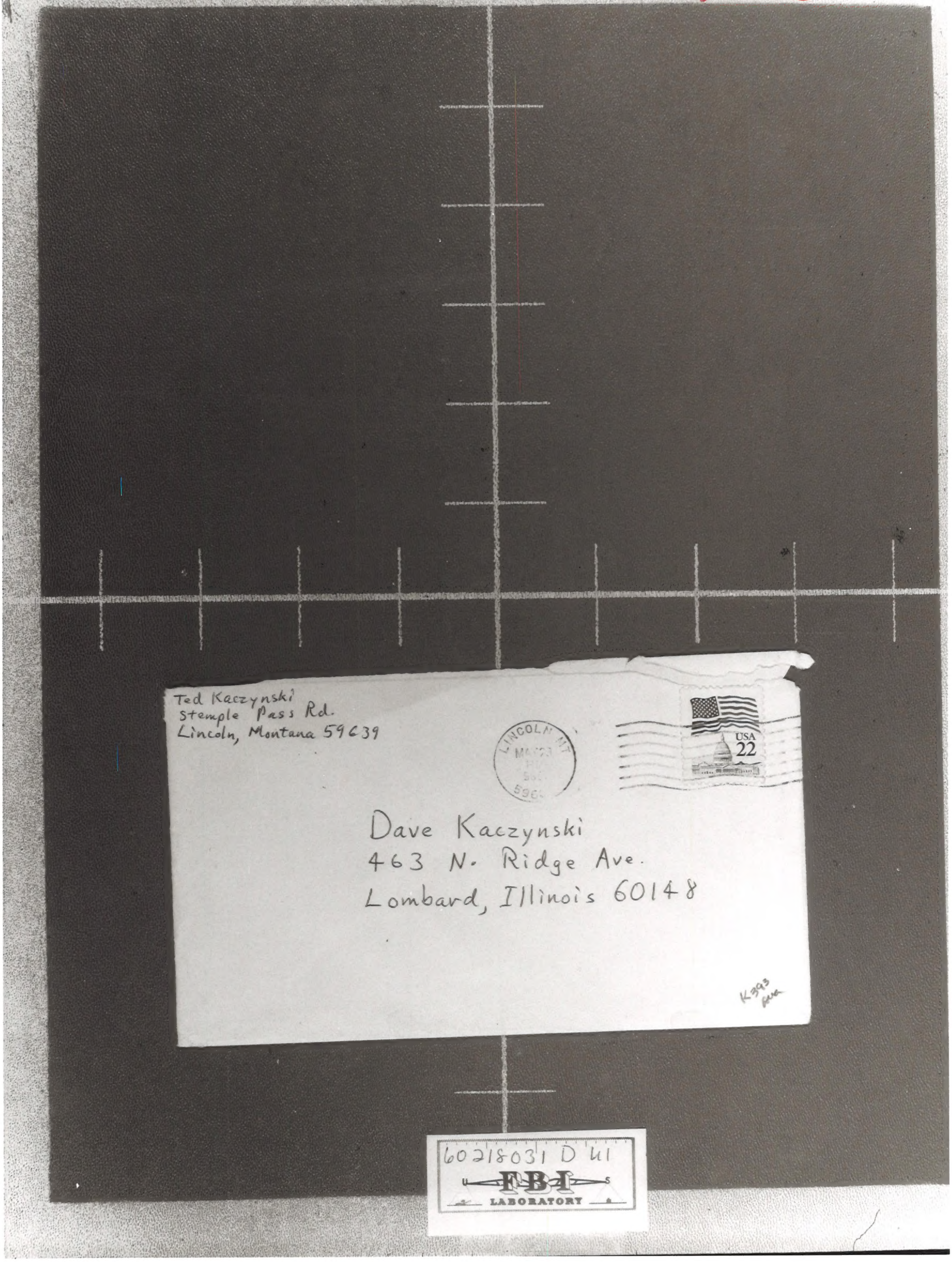
Ted Kaczynski
Stemple Pass Rd.
Lincoln, Montana 59639
LINCOLN MT
USA 22
Dave Kaczynski
463 N. Ridge Ave.
Lombard, Illinois 60148
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Dear Dave:

I'm sorry if I seemed to take a somewhat lecturing tone when I urged you to get that book on schizophrenia on Joel's account — I scribbled that note at the last minute before sending the letter — but you know how you tend to procrastinate, and I hate to think of that poor guy seeking help from crackpots who "put crystals on his body". Of course, I don't know for a fact that Joel's problem is schizophrenia, but it does seem rather likely — the disease is hereditary, most insanity is either schizophrenic or manic-depressive, schiz. is by far the more common of the two, and Joel doesn't sound like a manic-depressive.

Now I'll try to give a better answer to your long letter. I should first acknowledge that in your letter you did make it clear that you were putting forward those psychoanalytic speculations as a conjecture and not as an assertion. I tended to answer as if you had made a flat assertion, because I was so angry — my relations with our parents being such a sore point with me.

I find it burdensome to go over all this crap, but since you indicated that it was important to you to discuss it, I'll discuss it — except my relations with our parents which are not open to discussion.

Yes, I did tend to downgrade you when you were a kid. That's one of the main things I was apologizing for.

You say that I handed down to you "narrow values" and "repressive ideas". I can't imagine what those were. Would you please be more specific so that I can understand what you mean? Maybe you are referring to the fact that (owing to the fund of anger that I

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began accumulating during my teens, for obvious reasons) I tended to be aggressive in stating my own values and intolerant of any contrary values.

You did give one example in your letter of what you took to be my narrow values: You interpreted my interference in the case of Linda Erickson as an expression of repressive attitudes toward sex. I am really surprised at how completely you misunderstand me. Not just in this case but in other cases as well. I don't see how you could be acquainted with me for 35 years and know me so little. You seem to interpret me largely through your own preoccupations and consequently you badly misinterpret me. I don't think you ever will really know me. My interference in the case of Linda Erickson had nothing to do with sexual repression. If you wanted to go fuck some broad I couldn't care less, though I might wish you would choose someone more worthy than Linda Erickson. What I was afraid of was that you would make a fool of yourself and be exploited, and by someone (Linda E.) whom I found thoroughly contemptible. What it looked like to me was that (a) you were sexually attracted to Linda E. (your letter seems to confirm this); (b) your attraction was not just physical lust — I thought you might be in danger of falling in love with her (c) I found her thoroughly contemptible (d) I suspected that she had little or no sexual interest in you but that (e) she might be using you as a shoulder to cry on, and (f) I thought there might be a risk that she would exploit you by getting you to marry her, not because she loved you or anything like that but because she simply wanted to make her position respectable.

[Margin note, bracketing "at how completely ... will really know me.":] this is probably a little too harsh — but I get kind of pissed off at the way you sometimes misinterpret me.

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I must admit though that my motive for interfering was partly selfish — I would have felt it as a kind of personal humiliation for my brother to be exploited in that way or to marry someone so contemptible.

On p. 7 of your letter you give a list of traits of mine that you imagine are caused by my supposed "trauma" in the hospital. The trouble with your theory is that you didn't know me till I was older and already affected by our parents' mistreatment and by the bad situation in school after I skipped a grade. Most of those traits I did not have as a very young child. Of course, you can always speculate about delayed-action trauma — this psychoanalytic crap is flexible enough so that you can justify anything you want to believe. But since there are clear reasons in my later childhood for my developing such traits, these are the more likely cause. You don't realize that the atmosphere in our home was quite different during the first few years of my life than it was later. You know how it was during my teens — people always squabbling, mother crabby and irritable, Dad morosely passive. Too much ice-cream, candy, and treats, parents fat and self-indulgent. A general low-morale atmosphere. But it was very different up to the time when I was, say, 8 or 9 years old. Until then, the home atmosphere was cheerful, there was hardly any quarrelling, and there was a generally high-morale atmosphere. Ice-cream and candy were relatively infrequent treats and were consumed in moderation — consequently they were really enjoyed. Our parents were more alive and energetic. When punishment was necessary it was given with

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little or no anger and was used as a more-or-less rational means of training; whereas during my teens, when I was punished it was commonly an expression of anger or irritation on the part of our parents. Consequently this punishment was humiliating. The more-or-less rational punishment of the early years was not humiliating.

Also, after I skipped a grade, I was subjected to certain humiliations in school. Because of the situation both at home and at school, I had to do one of two things: either lose my self-respect or become hard. So I became hard — hence the traits you listed in your letter.

I should qualify this by mentioning that an aversion to overt signs of affection began somewhat earlier, and for a clear reason: As I remember it, as a very young child I was quite affectionate. When I was about six years old, the following incident occurred. Mother, dad, and I were all dressed up to go somewhere, and I was excited and happy. I ran up to Dad and said I wanted to kiss him. He said: "AAh, you're like a little girl, always wanting to kiss." I drew back, hurt. Then he said, in a somewhat grudging tone, "No, it's alright, you can kiss me." But naturally I refused to kiss him after that. I remember that for several years I had a strong aversion to kissing. You can draw your own conclusions. So much for your psychoanalytic speculation.

You wrote that (during my teens of course), I was "clearly often moody and unhappy ... in need of some kind of adult help." The only kind of adult help I

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needed was (a) to be taken out of that school where I was regarded as some kind of a freak genius, and (b) to have my parents stop abusing me.

Our parents did not "do a pretty decent job with our brother-to-brother relationship." On the contrary, they did a rotten job. If we have good relations today it is in spite of and not because of our parents. Let me remind you that when we got into a quarrel, our parents would scold me, not you, and when I said "but Dave did such and such", they would interrupt me with "That's alright, you're older, you should be more mature." They did this simply because they were too lazy to investigate the cause of the quarrel and arrive at a fair settlement. Naturally, this made me resentful, so that I was more aggressive with you next time. Thus their treatment made our relations worse and not better.

So much for all that shit.

I enjoyed hearing about Juan and the incident with the beer. As for his (to us) strange combination of wisdom and childishness, its something that I have encountered also in reading about other cultures. Apparently such things as wisdom, self-control, etc. are not simple and unified traits, but may be present in varying degrees in different areas of life. Thus, the eastern forest Indians of North America seem to have had very great self-discipline and perseverence in the face of physical pain, fatigues and dangers. They exhibited a kind of dignified, philosophical stoicism when undergoing severe hardships. On the other hand, they couldn't resist the lure of booze*; when they

*Apparently there is some evidence of a genetic basis for a weakness for alcohol.

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had maple sugar they gobbled it till it was all gone, instead of saving some to last all year round; and they wasted their strength in inter-tribal quarrels instead of presenting a united front against the whites. Francis Parkman pointed out that under certain circumstances they showed remarkable courage, yet in open battle they were rarely able to stand against the white soldiers — a bayonet charge was sure to send them running.

Also among other peoples I've read of mixures of traits that to us seem strange.

Did you take any hikes or make any visits to Mexico last winter? I'd enjoy hearing about any experiences that you might care to relate.

Durante el Siglo XVI, los Indios Cáribes de la isla de Domínica solían comer a cualquier español que llegara a la isla. Una vez, se enfermaron tanto por comer a un fraile, que de allí en adelante los que llevaban vestimentas eclesiásticas no fueron molestados. Así, cuando las naves españolas se detenían a tomar agua en Domínica, solían enviar o a un fraile, o a unos marineros vestidos de frailes.

— Ted

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